

2000 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With all of Tennessee's 98 juvenile courts participating, information regarding 80,837 children, 118,907 cases, and 144,546 referral reasons was reported to the Tennessee Juvenile Court Information System for the period between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2000. The number of children, cases, and referral reasons each increased slightly from calendar year 1999.

During 2000, over half (52%) of the referral reasons in Tennessee's juvenile courts were for alleged delinquent offenses. Status offenses represented 20% of referral reasons, while non-offense referral reasons comprised an additional 28% of the total juvenile court referrals. A status offense is an offense committed by a child, that if committed by an adult, would not be considered an offense or unlawful act. An example of this is smoking when one is not legally an adult.

When comparing the 2000 data with those of 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999, the two most commonly referred delinquent offenses continued to be traffic offenses and theft of property. Truancy remained the most often-reported referral reason within the status offense category for 2000, and in-state runaway charges remained the second most reported status offense. Referral reasons surrounding issues of dependency/neglect and custody remained the most prevalent within the non-offense category.

The 2000 data continued to reflect that males were referred to juvenile court almost twice as often as females, and were referred for alleged delinquent offenses almost four times more often than their female counterparts. The number of referral reasons for status offense and non-offense reasons, however, continued to vary much less with respect to gender (11,897 status offense referrals of females, 16,112 status offense referrals of males). Age statistics for 2000 showed that 15-year-olds through 18-year-olds for both genders constituted 55% of the juvenile court population (17 through 18 accounted for 25%).

Regarding race, little difference was seen between previous years' data and those of 2000. In 2000, African American and other non-white children were reported as representing 37% of the juvenile court population, while constituting only 22% of the overall juvenile population of Tennessee. Conversely, white children were reported as making up 63% of the juvenile court population, while constituting 78% of the overall juvenile population.

Law enforcement continued to be the most often cited referral source for juveniles to the courts (50.4%), while parents continued to represent the second most often cited referral source (10.7%). With regard to the most frequently reported reason for referral, law enforcement personnel appeared more likely to refer juveniles for traffic complaints, while parents made referrals most often for unruly behavior and custody. The 2000 data shows schools (8.8%) as the third most often reported source, while court staff (8.5%) was the fourth and relatives (6.2%) was the fifth.